



University of Technology, Sydney

# **Assessment of Pre-treatment to Seawater Reverse Osmosis**

By

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of the requirements for the degree of  
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## CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for any degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledge within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. And help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Candidature

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title page	i
Certificate	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of contents	iv
Nomenclature	x
List of the tables	xii
List of the figures	xiv
Abstract	xvi

## Chapter 1

### Background & Introduction 1-1

1.1 Water crisis	1-2
1.2 Desalination in Australia	1-3
1.3 Reverse Osmosis (RO)	1-4
1.4 Membrane fouling and Pretreatment	1-5
1.5 MF/UF as a pretreatment	1-6
1.6 Characterisation of organics present in sea/brackish water	1-7
1.7 Fouling indices	1-7
1.8 Pre-treatment by biofiltration	1-8
1.9 Aim of the study	1-8

## Chapter 2

Literature Review	2-1
2.1 Introduction	2-2
2.1.1 Seawater	2-2
2.1.1.1 Seawater organic matter (SWOM)	2-2
2.1.1.2 Dissolved organic matter in seawater	2-3
2.1.1.3 Characterization of organics present in seawater	2-3
2.1.1.4 Inorganic matter	2-5
2.1.2 Seawater Reverse Osmosis in desalination	2-5
2.1.3 Membrane Fouling	2-6
2.1.4 Types of membrane fouling	2-6
2.1.4.1 Particulate/Colloidal fouling	2-8
2.1.4.2 Organic fouling	2-8
2.1.4.3 Inorganic fouling/Scaling	2-10
2.1.4.4 Biofouling	2-10
2.1.5 Pretreatment	2-11
2.1.5.1 Conventional pre-treatment	2-11
2.1.5.2 Non-Conventional pre-treatment ( MF/UF as a pre-treatment	2-13
2.1.5.3 Biofilter	2-14
2.1.6 Comparison of Conventional and Non-conventional pretreatment	2-15
2.1.7 Case studies of existing plants	2-16
2.1.8 Fouling Indices	2-21
2.1.8.1 SDI and MFI	2-21
2.1.8.2 MFI-UF	2-22
2.1.8.3 MFI-NF	2-23



## Chapter 3

### Experimental Investigation 3-1

3.1	Introduction	3-2
3.2	Experimental Materials	3-2
3.2.1	Seawater (Rose bay)	3-2
3.2.2	Seawater (Chowder bay)	3-2
3.2.3	Synthetic wastewater	3-3
3.2.4	Physical properties of GAC and Anthracite	3-4
3.3	Experimental Methods	3-5
3.3.1	Flocculation as pretreatment	3-5
3.3.2	Adsorption using powdered activated carbon (PAC) as pretreatment	3-5
3.3.3	Deep bed filtration as pretreatment	3-5
3.3.4	Flocculation followed by microfiltration	3-6
3.3.5	Long term biofiltration	3-6
3.3.6	Membranes and Flux decline experiments	3-7
3.3.7	Reverse osmosis (RO) as a post treatment	3-8
3.4	Analytical methods	3-9
3.4.1	SDI and MFI	3-9
3.4.2	Pore blocking index	3-11
3.4.3	CF-MFI	3-12
3.5	Molecular weight distribution (MWD) of organic matter	3-14

## Chapter 4

### Results and Discussion 4-1

4.1	The effect of pre-treatment on the fouling propensity of the feed	4-2
4.1.1	Fouling Indices	4-2

4.1.1.1	Silt Density Index (SDI)	4-2
4.1.1.2	Modified fouling index (MFI)	4-3
4.1.1.3	Cross-flow sampler MFI (CFS - MFI)	4-5
4.1.1.4	Pore Blocking Index (Spb)	4-5
4.1.2	Effect of pre-treatment on the fouling propensity	4-6
4.1.2.1	Effect of different pretreatments on MFI and CFS-MFI	4-7
4.1.2.2	Effect of FeCl <sub>3</sub> dose on MFI and CFS-MFI	4-8
4.1.2.3	The effect of PAC dose	4-9
4.1.2.4	MWD of the effluents after flocculation and adsorption	4-10
4.1.2.5	The effect of MWD on Spb, MFI and CFS-MFI	4-11
4.1.3	Conclusions	4-14
4.2	Effect of pre-treatment in reducing the fouling: A Laboratory scale study with seawater	4-15
4.2.1	Seawater	4-15
4.2.2	Pretreatments	4-17
4.2.2.1	Comparison of different pretreatment in terms of MFI	4-17
4.2.2.2	Comparison of pre-treatment in terms of SWOM removal efficiency	4-18
4.2.2.3	MWD of SWOM after different pre-treatments	4-19
4.2.3	GAC biofiltration as pre-treatment	4-20
4.2.3.1	MFI	4-20
4.2.3.2	DOC removal efficiency	4-20
4.2.3.3	MWD of the permeate of GAC filtration	4-21
4.2.4	Concluding remark	4-22
4.3	Assessment of pre-treatment to microfiltration for desalination in terms of fouling index and molecular weight distribution	4-23
4.3.1	Characteristics of seawater	4-23
4.3.2	Comparison of different pretreatment methods	4-23
4.3.2.1	Effect of Pretreatment on microfiltration (MF) flux decline	4-24
4.3.2.2	Effect of pre-treatment on Turbidity removal	4-18
4.3.2.3	Pre-treatment and change in molecular weight distribution of organic matter (MWD)	4-25

4.3.3	Pre-treatment and Modified Fouling Index (MFI)	4-26
4.3.4	Conclusion	4-27
4.4	Biofilter as Pretreatment to Membrane Based Desalination: Evaluation in terms of Fouling Index	4-28
4.4.1	Characteristics of seawater	4-29
4.4.2	Pre-treatment	4-29
	4.4.2.1 Variation of seawater Characteristics during experiments	4-29
	4.4.2.2 Effect of filtration velocity to turbidity removal	4-30
	4.4.2.3 SDI10 and MFI	4-31
	4.4.2.4 Correlation between different fouling indices	4-33
	4.4.2.5 Head build up	4-35
4.4.3	Reverse Osmosis as post-treatment after pretreatments	4-36
4.4.4	Concluding remarks	4-37

## Chapter 5

### Conclusions 5-1

5.1	Comparison of pre-treatments to wastewater in terms of modified fouling index (MFI) and cross-flow sampler modified fouling index – CFS-MFI	5-2
5.2	Comparison of different pretreatment for seawater (lab scale)	5-2
5.3	Assessment of pretreatment to microfiltration for desalination in terms of fouling index and molecular weight distribution (on-site)	5-3

### References R-1

### Appendix A A-1

Modified fouling index calculation



# Appendix B

A-3

Publications made from the study

## Nomenclature

A	=	the membrane surface area (m <sup>2</sup> )
ASTM	=	American Society for Testing and Materials
BOD	=	Biological oxygen demand
BTSE	=	Biologically treated sewage effluent
BOM	=	biodegradable organic matter
C <sub>b</sub>	=	the concentration of particles in a feed water (mg/l)
COD	=	Chemical oxygen demand
CFS-MFI	=	cross-flow sampler modified fouling index
Da	=	Dalton
DOC	=	dissolved organic carbon
DMF	=	dual media filter
EfOM	=	effluent organic matter
HPSEC	=	High pressure size exclusion chromatography
MFI	=	modified fouling index
MWD	=	molecular weight distribution
MF	=	microfiltration
MFI-UF	=	modified fouling index by using ultra filter membrane
MFI-NF	=	modified fouling index by using nano filter membrane
MWCO	=	molecular weight cut-off
NF	=	nanofiltration
NOM	=	Natural Organic Matter
PAC	=	Powdered activated carbon
R <sub>m</sub>	=	membrane resistance
RO	=	reverse osmosis
SEC	=	size exclusion chromatography
SWOM	=	Seawater organic matter
Spb	=	pore blocking slope by critical time – pore blocking index (1/L)
t	=	filtration time (s)

TDS	=	total dissolved solid
V	=	total permeate volume (l)
$\Delta P$	=	applied trans-membrane pressure (Pa)
$\eta$	=	water viscosity at 20°C (N s/m <sup>2</sup> )
$\alpha$	=	the specific resistance of the cake deposited

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1	Water use by an average household in NSW
Table 1.2	Water supply capacity and desalination status for some Australian big cities
Table 2.1	The characteristics of seawater at Chowder Bay during June- October 2008
Table 2.2	Organic matter and Molecular weight found in this study
Table 2.3	Inorganic matter present in seawater
Table 2.4	Organic matter fouling factors (adapted from Al-Amoudi and Lovitt, 2007)
Table 2.5	Characteristics of media filter used before seawater desalination (According to the Water desalination technical manual, Department of army, USA, 1986)
Table 2.6	Comparison of conventional and non-conventional pretreatment
Table 2.7	Jeddah SWRO Plant (capacity 56,800 m <sup>3</sup> /d)
Table 2.8	Doha Research Plant, Kuwait
Table 2.9	French Institute of Marine Research
Table 2.10	Persian Gulf
Table 2.11	The International Power Mitsui Operation, Indonesia
Table 2.12	ONDEO Services, Gibraltar
Table 2.13	Singapore SWRO
Table 2.14	Ashdod, Mediterranean Sea
Table 2.15	Addur SWRO Desalination Plant, Bahrain
Table 3.1	Characteristics of the seawater (Rose bay, Sydney)
Table 3.2	Characteristics of seawater used in this study
Table 3.3	Composition of synthetic wastewater (Seo et al, 1996)
Table 3.4	Physical properties of Anthracite and GAC
Table 3.5	Characteristics of RO membrane used
Table 4.1	MFI-CFS- MFI of SWW (synthetic wastewater) for different pre-treatment
Table 4.2	Weight-averaged MW values of the effluent samples after flocculation
Table 4.3	Weight-averaged MW values of the effluent samples after adsorption

Table 4.4	t/V vs. V of standard MFI and t/V vs. V of CFS-MFI with different pre-treatment
Table 4.5	MFI for different pre-treatment
Table 4.6	MFI and CF-MFI after GAC filtration
Table 4.7	Comparison of different pre-treatment methods
Table 4.8	Characteristics of the seawater (SIMS, Chowder Bay, Sydney)
Table 4.9	Comparison of different fouling indices for Anthracite biofilter (filtration velocity = 10 m/h)
Table 4.10	Comparison of different fouling indices for GAC biofilter (filtration velocity = 10 m/h)
Table 4.11	Comparison of different fouling indices for Anthracite biofilter (filtration velocity = 5 m/h)
Table 4.12	Comparison of different fouling indices for GAC biofilter (filtration velocity = 5 m/h )



## LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 2.1 MWD of SWOM (seawater organic matter)
- Figure 2.2 Complete picture of fouling (Adapted from Vrouwenvelder et al., 2003)
- Figure 2.3 Types of membrane foulant in reverse osmosis membrane (adapted from Khedr et al., 2000)
- Figure 3.1 Schematic of the batch experiment using Jar test apparatus
- Figure 3.2 Schematic diagram of biofiltration column
- Figure 3.3 Schematic drawing of cross flow unit
- Figure 3.4 Schematic drawing of cross-flow SWRO unit used in this study
- Figure 3.5 MFI and SDI experimental setup
- Figure 3.6 Cake filtration curve (Boerlage, Kennedy et al. 1997)
- Figure 3.7  $t$  (time)/ $v$  (permeate volume) vs.  $t$  for feed water
- Figure 3.8 Schematic diagram of cross flow unit
- Figure 4.1 Cake filtration curve (Boerlage, Kennedy et al. 1997)
- Figure 4.2  $t$  (time)/ $v$  (permeate volume) vs.  $v$  for feed water (0.45  $\mu\text{m}$  membrane, Pressure = 200 KPa, Temperature = 20 oC)
- Figure 4.3  $t$  (time)/ $v$  (permeate volume) vs.  $t$  for feed water
- Figure 4.4 a  $t/V$  vs.  $V$  of standard MFI with different pretreatment
- Figure 4.4 b  $t/V$  vs.  $V$  of CFS-MFI with different pretreatment
- Figure 4.5 The effect of  $\text{FeCl}_3$  dosage on MFI and CFS-MFI
- Figure 4.6 The effect of PAC dosage on MFI and CFS-MFI
- Figure 4.7 (a) MWD of the effluent of flocculation
- Figure 4.7 (b) MWD of the effluent of adsorption
- Figure 4.8 MWD of SWOM (seawater organic matter)
- Figure 4.9 SWOM removal by pre-treatment of MF,  $\text{FeCl}_3$  Flocculation, PAC adsorption and GAC Biofiltration (seawater DOC = 1.8 mg/L)
- Figure 4.10 MWD of SWOM after  $\text{FeCl}_3$  flocculation, PAC adsorption and GAC Biofiltration pretreatments ( $\text{FeCl}_3$  dose = 2 mg/L; PAC dose = 0.05 g/L, GAC column depth of 30 cm)
- Figure 4.11 DOC removal of the GAC biofilter (filtration rate = 1 m/h, GAC medium depth = 30 cm, average influent DOC = 1.8 mg/L)
- Figure 4.12 MWD of SWOM after different days from GAC pretreatment

- Figure 4.13 Variation of CFMF flux for seawater with and without of pre-treatment (membrane pore size = 0.45  $\mu\text{m}$ , Cross flow velocity = 0.5 m/s, Pressure = 60kPa)
- Figure 4.14 MW distribution of SWOM (seawater organic matter) of seawater and with pre-treated seawater
- Figure 4.15 Seawater characteristics during the experimental period
- Figure 4.16 Effect of filtration velocity on filtrate turbidity (GAC and anthracite column depth: 80 cm, velocity: 5 and 10 m/h)
- Figure 4.17 SDI and MFI profiles for Anthracite and GAC biofilters at 5 m/h and 10 m/h
- Figure 4.18 Effect of filter media and filtration velocity on head loss development (filter medium depth = 80 cm)
- Figure 4.19 Temporal variation of RO filtration flux for seawater with and without pretreatment (SR membrane, crossflow velocity = 0.5 m/s, operating pressure 6000 kPa, feeding volume: 5 L each day)

## ABSTRACT

Membrane based desalination is widely used process to produce fresh water either from wastewater or seawater. However, membrane fouling on the reverse osmosis is a major hurdle. It increases the energy consumption as well as operating cost of reverse osmosis. A pre-treatment before reverse osmosis (RO) desalination can significantly reduce the membrane fouling.

The main objective of this study was to assess the relative merits of different pre-treatment processes in terms of membrane fouling reduction, and removal of organic matter in terms of molecular weight distribution and dissolved organic carbon (DOC). Different fouling indices (such as silt density index (SDI), modified fouling index (MFI) and cross-flow sampler modified fouling index (CFS-MFI)) were used to study the pre-treatment efficiency of different process such as flocculation, adsorption, microfiltration and biofiltration.

The effectiveness of different pretreatment on the fouling propensity of the feed was studied using synthetic waste water. The fouling potential of the feed was characterized by standard modified fouling index (MFI) and cross-flow sampler modified fouling index (CFS-MFI). In CFS-MFI, a cross-flow sampler was used to simulate the condition of a cross-flow filtration. The results indicated that the pretreatment such as flocculation with an optimum dose of 68 mg/l  $\text{FeCl}_3$  and adsorption with powdered activated carbon (PAC) of 1 g/l substantially reduced the fouling propensity of the feed. The standard MFI of flocculated wastewater was reduced by around 99% compared to that of the untreated wastewater. The effect of molecular weight distribution (MWD) of the foulants in the wastewater on the fouling propensity of the feed was also investigated. The MWD of pretreated effluent was correlated well with the MFI and CFS-MFI indices.

Different processes such as flocculation with ferric chloride ( $\text{FeCl}_3$ ) and deep bed filtration (sand filtration and dual media filtration) as a pre-treatment to microfiltration (MF) were used for seawater desalination. The performance of these pre-treatments was determined in terms of silt density index (SDI) and modified fouling index (MFI) and flux decline in MF. Flux decline of MF with seawater was 45% without any pre-treatment, 42% after pre-



treatment of  $\text{FeCl}_3$  flocculation, 24% after pre-treatment of sand filtration with in-line coagulation and 22% after pre-treatment of dual media filtration (sand and anthracite), respectively. MFI and SDI also indicated that deep bed filtration with in-line flocculation was better pre-treatment than flocculation alone. Detailed molecular weight distribution (MWD) of seawater organic matter was examined after different pretreatments. MWD of the initial seawater mainly ranged from 1510 Da to 130 Da. Deep bed filtration with in-line flocculation removed relatively large molecular weight of organic matter (1510 – 1180 Da), while the small molecular weights (less than 530 Da) were not removed.

The removal of particulate matter and dissolved organic matter from seawater by the use of biofiltration was investigated through long term on-site operation of biofilters. Granular activated carbon (GAC) and anthracite were used as biofilter media at two different filtration velocities. Filtrate quality was measured in terms of silt density index (SDI), modified fouling index (MFI) and turbidity removal. Reverse osmosis (RO) was used as a post treatment. Both biofilters demonstrated similar fouling reduction behavior in terms of SDI and MFI. Fouling potential in terms of MFI values decreased to  $10 \text{ s/L}^2$  within the first 10-15 days of operation and kept constant up to the remaining experimental period of 55 days of operation for both GAC and anthracite biofilter. The filtrate turbidity was steady after 10 days and remained low at a value of 0.2-0.3 NTU and 0.28-0.31 NTU for anthracite and GAC biofilter respectively. Furthermore, the headloss development was low and within 20 cm for biofilter operated at a low velocity of 5 m/h. A post treatment of reverse osmosis after a pretreatment of GAC and anthracite biofilters showed a reduction in normalized flux decline ( $J/J_0$ ) from 0.22 to 0.12 and 0.35 to 0.21 during the first 20 hours respectively. The RO flux for seawater declined at a faster rate and continued even after 3 days when no pretreatment was provided.

Based on the experiments, it was found that both media filtration (dual media) and biofiltration are appropriate pre-treatment before RO. In particular, Biofilter led to a consistent removal of organic matter over a long period of time.